

## THE RISE OF VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: MILITANCY IN THE NIGER-DELTA REGION

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### ABSTRACT

*Nigeria in recent years has been facing the crises such as Boko Haram insurgency and militancy in the Niger Delta. The crises have led to the destruction of many lives and properties in the country. In an attempt to identify the causes of rise of violence particularly militancy in the Niger Delta, the study adopted a Frustration-Aggression theory to serve as a framework for analysis. In the case of data collection, data were collected from published and unpublished articles, Newspapers etc. which were analysed using content analysis. The study found that the genesis of the militancy in the Niger Delta was as a result of the environmental degradation, poverty and unemployment. The study recommends that all governments should collaborate with the oil exploration companies to provide sustainable and adequate job opportunities to people, especially youth and ensure a strict regulation for the environmental protection.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Violence, Militancy in the Niger-Delta, Environmental Pollution and Degradation & Poverty and Unemployment*

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### INTRODUCTION

The fundamental duty of any government in the world is to protect the lives and properties of its people from any form of violence and ensure their peaceful co-existence (Jami'u, 2013). However, violence is a global phenomenon which exists almost in every country in the world, though the form and nature vary from one country to another (Alao, et al, 2012). A violence is an intentional act committed by a person, groups or community that result in injuries, death, psychological harms, maldevelopment and deprivation of the others (Jami'u, 2013).

Right from its independence, Nigeria has been facing a series of violence ranging from ethno-religious conflict, tribal feud, Biafran crisis, Maitatsine etc. (Okene, 2011). However, in recent years there manifested a set organized of violent acts of Boko Haram in the Northeastern part of the country and the militancy in the Niger-Delta region and more recently Fulani-herdsmen crisis. The Niger Delta region is an oil exploring region in Nigeria located in the south-south region of the country where the main source of government revenue emanates from (Godwill, 2010). Formally, the people of the region were largely fishers and farmers, but since the beginning of oil exploration in the region, the people of the region have been facing problems of environmental pollutions and degradations (Ejibunu, 2007). Government and oil companies did little to address these problems. Hence there manifested unemployment, poverty and so on (ibid). In light of this problem, the youth in the region took arms to protest against the government and the oil companies. Therefore, this paper examines the causes of the militancy in the Niger Delta region.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The current violence in the Niger-Delta region in Nigeria has led to the destruction of lives and properties of the people as well as the socio-political and economic development of the country (Ejibunu, 2007). It is in line with the aforementioned problem that this study aims to examine the causes of the crisis posed by the Niger Delta militants.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

This study aims at achieving the following:

- To identify the causes of the militancy in the Niger-Delta region in Nigeria.
- To examine the consequences of the crisis on the socio-economic activities of the people in the region

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions are as follows:

- What are the causes of the rise of violence perpetrated by militants in the Niger-Delta in Nigeria?
- What are the consequences of the crisis on socio-economic activities of the people in the region?

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Although, there are related studies on the problem under study, but no study has been conducted on this particular topic. Therefore, the study will provide with the government and security agencies useful information and suggestions on how to tackle the crisis of militancy in the Niger Delta region. It will also contribute to the existing knowledge on the issue under study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Nigeria is Africa's most populous and wealthy country, but over the years, the violence is on the rise. This is mostly attributed to the failure of the government to address the causes of this violence (Jami'u, 2013).

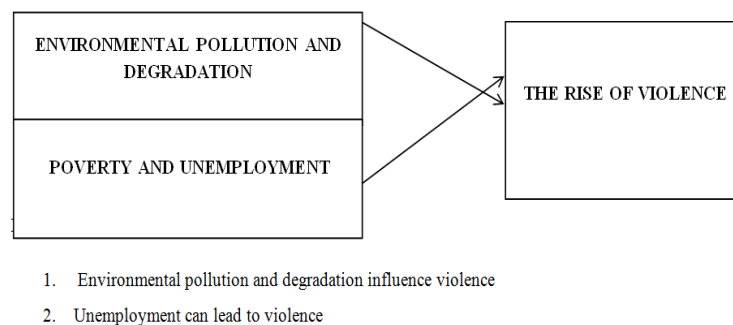
However, various studies examined the causes of violence in Nigeria from different angles. For example, Olaide (2009), Okene (2011), Nwanegbo & Odigbo (2013), Jami'u (2013), Ibaba (2008), observed that the genesis of the rise of violence in Nigeria could be traced back to the factors such as ideology, ethnicity, unemployment and poverty, corruption, ignorance, bad governance and leadership, social justice, marginalization and neglect, human right violation and frustration and alienation. As regard to the poverty and unemployment, it is apparent that the incidence of poverty and youth unemployment is very alarming. Records show that the incidence of in Nigeria continues to rise from about 28.1% in 1980 to 46% in 1986 and continue to rise to 65.6% in 1996. At the present it is estimated to be 70% in 2012 (Fapojuwo et al., 2012). Consequently, some argue that the violence in Nigeria is rooted to the deficiency of structural federalism of the country. This is because they believe that since the creation of Nigeria, the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the dominant in the affairs of the country which led to the marginalisation of some other ethnic groups like those in the Niger Delta region(Ejibunu,2007). This gave a room for those ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region who feel that they are being marginalized despite the fact that they have the country's biggest source of revenue.

Moreover, Nigeria has been earning billions of dollars from oil, but yet majority of the people in the country live below the poverty line. This failure of the government to address the problem of poverty, unemployment, environmental

damages at the Niger Delta region led to the violence to be perpetrated by groups of youth like the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, Niger Delta People Volunteer Force, The Joint Revolutionary Council etc. (Ejibunu, 2007).

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Violence is an intentional act committed by a person, groups or community that result in injuries, death, psychological harms, maldevelopment and deprivation of the others (Alao et al, 2012). However, many theories seek to explain violence from different angles. These theories include: cognitive dissonance theory of Festinger, theory of rebellion by Max, the deprivation theory by Davis, Frustration-Aggression theory by Dollard et al (1939). For the purpose of explaining the frustration of the people of the Niger Delta, this study shall adopts Frustration-Aggression theory developed by Dollard et al (1939) as modified by Aminu (2013). The theory seeks to explain how frustration leads to aggression and violence. The theory is based on the assumption that human frustration influences an aggressive behaviour i.e. when a person’s endeavour to attain his goal is hindered, then an aggressive behaviour follows. The theory also seeks to explain why violence takes place. In a nutshell the theory seeks to explain that “there is no smoke without fire”. Therefore, this study incurs that the Frustration-Aggression theory is appropriate in explaining the militancy in the Niger Delta, which occasions as a result of the frustration of the people particularly youth in the region. The figure below depicts the framework for analysis:



**Figure 1**

**SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

This study is limited to the crisis of militancy in the Niger-Delta region conducted by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force, and The Joint Revolutionary Council etc.

**METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The study is qualitative in nature and employs both primary and secondary data. The primary data includes Daily Newspapers, magazines. The secondary data will cover journals, and other published and unpublished works in the related area. In the case of analysis, the study employs content analysis.

**Environmental Pollution and Degradation**

It is obvious that the activities of oil exploration the world over have negative consequences on the environment of the host communities. The Niger Delta people for over 40 years of the start of oil exploration have been facing problems of environmental pollution and degradation in water, farmlands etc. which cause a lot of diseases to be spread in the region. However, evidences prove that a lot of environmental challenges have been facing the region which government did little in addressing the problem. For example, Ejibunu (2007) demonstrates that the exploration of oil by oil companies like

SHELL, Chevron, Mobil, Total etc. in the region has posed a serious environmental problems of erosion, flooding, land degradation, destruction of natural ecosystem, fisheries depletion, toxic waste water into the rivers etc. which cause poverty and unemployment to be rampant especially among the youth in the region. This largely affected the land that communities in the area use for farming and fishing paving a way for mass poverty and unemployment to flourish.

Furthermore, the people facing these kinds of problems are supposed to receive much from both the government and the oil companies in order to compensate them for the environmental damages caused as a result of oil exploration, but as regard to Niger Delta region reverse is the case. Aminu (2013) observes that the people of the Niger Delta face enormous problems which government did not do well to overcome these problems. Failure to address their problems led to some groups of people to take arms to protest against the government and the oil companies in order for the government have a prompt and holistic approach to tackle the problems they are facing. This arms taking has a negative effect on the socio-economic and political activities of the people and the oil companies in the region and the country at large. This is because these militants engage in hostage taking, kidnapping, oil pipe line vandalization and killings, which have a direct negative effect on the economic and political stability and a threat to national security of the country.

### Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty and unemployment are global challenges which almost all countries in the world are bedeviled with. However, the repercussion of this in most African countries results in socio-economic, political stability which leads to violence and societal conflict to prevail in societies (Surajo, 2012).

In Nigeria, evidences show that the incidence of poverty has been on increase from about 28.1% in 1980 to 46% in 1986 and continue to rise to 65.6% in 1996. At the present it is estimated to be 70% in 2012 (Fapojuwo et al., 2012). In addition to that, available statistical data indicate that Nigeria has a youth population of about 60 million out of which 40 million are unemployed (Fapojuwo et al., 2012). This problem mostly affects tertiary institution's graduates who spend years after completion of their programme without securing jobs. The table below shows the statistics of different categories of unemployed youth in the country.

**Table 1: Youth Unemployment Rate by Educational Level in Nigeria from 2003-2007**

<b>Educational Levels</b>	<b>2003 (%)</b>	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2005 (%)</b>	<b>2006 (%)</b>	<b>2007 (%)</b>
No Schooling	9.7	5.3	33.6	33.1	33.1
Primary School	21.7	16.6	18.0	17.9	17.8
Secondary School	51.3	52.9	32.3	32.3	32.3
Tertiary Institution	17.3	25.2	16.1	16.7	16.8

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria 2008, cited in Surajo, 2013.

The Niger Delta is the region in Nigeria that is blessed with oil, which generates about 80% of the country's revenue. Despite the enormous resources of oil they have been endowed with the region is one of the regions that are faced with serious problems of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. This is largely due to the oil exploration which led to the environmental pollution and degradation in the region. Prior to the exploration of oil in the region, people mostly depended on the natural environment for livelihood in the areas of farming, fishing, etc. but as a result of oil spill the farmlands and the rivers were polluted to the extent that people could no longer farm and do the fishing for their live sustenance as they used to do previously (Joseph et al, 2013). This problem has worsened the living condition of the people in the area as majority of them are poor living in rural areas without portable water drinking, electricity, good healthcare delivery,

housing, roads and live below the poverty line. In line with this problem, the World Bank Report of 1995 cited in (Joseph et al, 2013) that described the Niger Delta region as poor because the GNP per capital is below the national average of US 280 in the face of high population growth rate couple with the severe habitable land constraints. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) delineates that the Niger Delta has an 'an administrative neglect, poor infrastructural services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty and endemic conflict'.

In light of the above problem of poverty and unemployment facing the people of the Niger Delta region and poor government policies in reaction to tackle the problems, some people, mostly youth formed different groups like the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Volunteer Force etc. to protest against the government and oil companies due to the problems they are facing. This protest manifests in the kidnapping of the oil companies' workers, oil pipeline vandalization etc. which culminated into violence in the region. However, evidences indicate that these militant groups generate money from their militant activities. For example, Nda-Isaiah (2013) points out that poverty and unemployment are very pervasive in the Niger Delta to the extent that youth join militant groups in order to have a livelihood. He, therefore, argues that as long as poverty and unemployment continue to exist the crisis in the region will never come to an end. This is true because those militant engage in the militancy because they are unemployed and they have to survive. In his view Salami (2013) Nigeria is a country endowed with enormous national resources, including oil, but yet majority of the populace is having a serious problem of poverty and unemployment, which is attributed to lack of political will, skewed budgetary allocation, poorly coordinated intervention programs, get rich quick syndrome etc. This problem gave a room for the violent activities such as militancy in the Niger Delta region, thuggery, robbery, insurgency, kidnapping, etc. to erupt.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It can be seen from the above that the rise of violence in the Niger Delta region was owed to the frustration of the people in the region, which stemmed out from the environmental pollution and degradation, poverty and unemployment occasioned as a result of the neglect from both government and oil companies in the region. Therefore, there is a need for both government and oil companies to partner and provide sustainable employment opportunities and ensure the strict regulation of the environmental protection laws. Secondly, the government in collaboration with oil companies should design programmes that will provide a lasting solution to their environmental pollution. Finally, government should take adequate measure to make sure that these programmes of poverty eradication are properly implemented.

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